



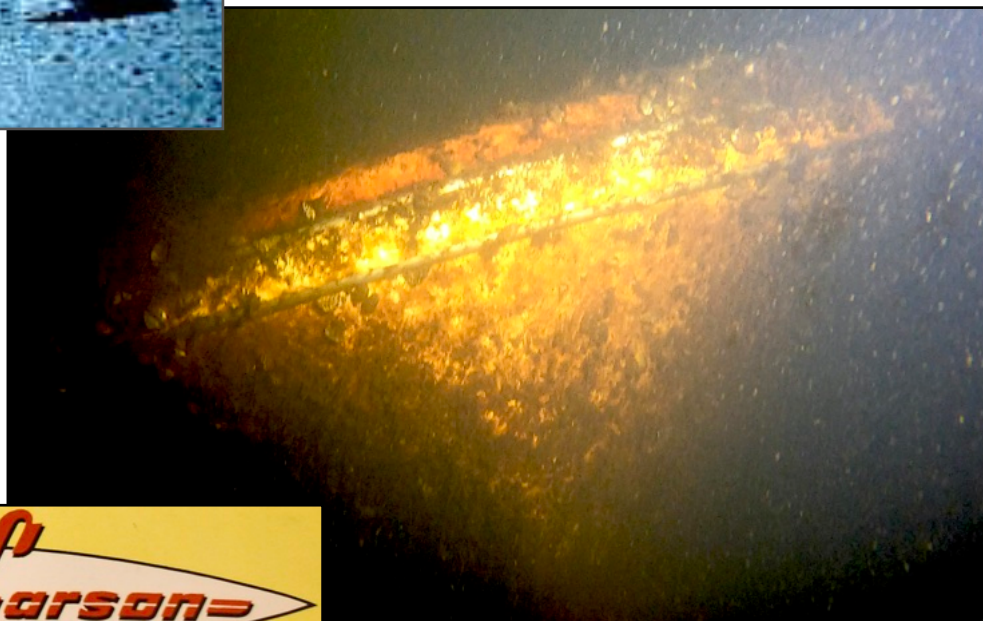
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DOCUMENTATION, CONSERVATION, AND
PRESERVATION OF FINITE MARITIME
CULTURAL MINNESOTA'S RESOURCES

Ann Merriman
Christopher Olson

Minnesota Archaeology License
25-22

Minnesota Suburban Lakes Projects Series

White Bear Lake Underwater Archaeology Survey Project 2 Report



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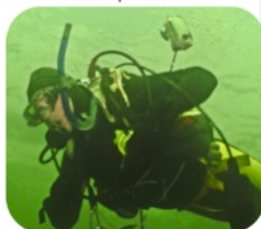
Ann Merriman, Christopher Olson, and Maritime Heritage Minnesota

Acknowledgments

Maritime Heritage Minnesota (MHM) thanks Bruce Koenen and Amanda Gronhvd of the Office of the State Archaeologist for their efforts. MHM could not have completed this project without the in-kind support of volunteer divers Josh Knutson and Kelly Nehowig. MHM thanks these talented and ethical men for their time and skill. This project could not have been completed in a timely fashion without the consideration of Michael and Karen Kramer for on-land storage of research boat *Anomaly 51*. Lastly, MHM thanks our Board of Trustees Michael F Kramer, Deb Handschin, and Steve Hack for their continued support.

All underwater images in this report derived from video recorded by Josh Knutson and Kelly Nehowig.

Underwater Archaeologist
Christopher Olson



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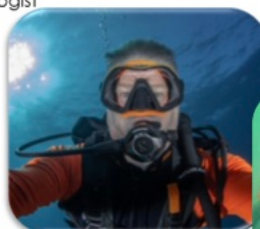


Volunteer Diver
Mark Slick

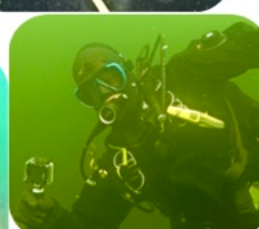


Volunteer Diver
Kelly Nehowig

Volunteer Diver
Josh Knutson



Volunteer Diver
Greg Flanagan



Volunteer Diver
Ed Nelson

Mascots & Computing Cats



Freddie
Mercury Cat
&
Rodney
McKay Cat



Volunteer Dive Crew
Ann Nehowig



Trustee
Steve Hack



Trustee
Deb Handschin



Chair
Mike Kramer

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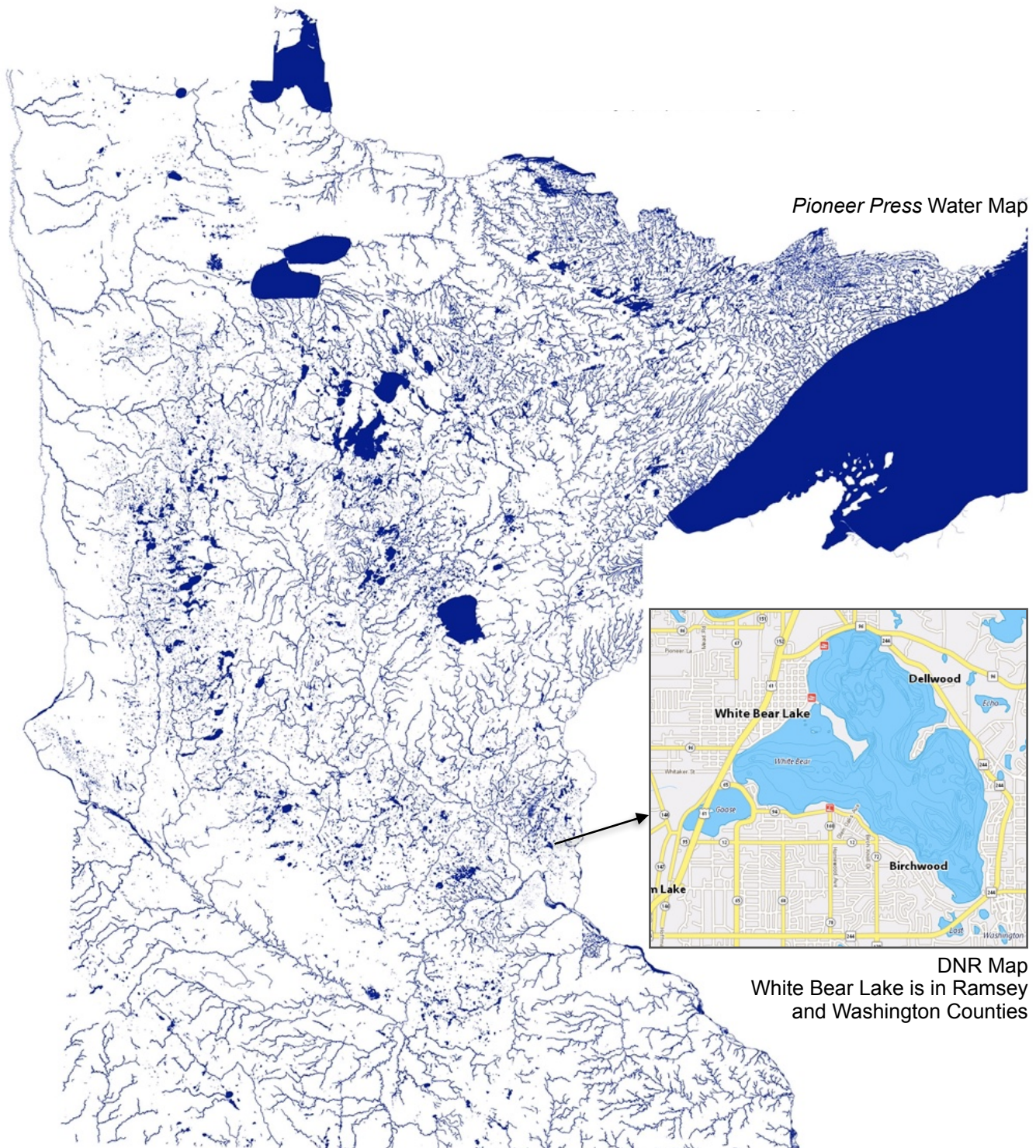
“A small St. Paul-based nonprofit, Maritime Heritage Minnesota (MHM), re-establish[ed] the discipline of underwater archaeology in Minnesota....MHM...conducts groundbreaking nautical archeological and maritime historical research.”

~Steve Elliott, Former Minnesota Historical Society CEO and Director, January 2015

Introduction

Wrecks and the artifacts associated with them tell a story. Removing or otherwise disturbing artifacts, treating them as commodities that can be sold, obliterates that story. Nautical archaeological and maritime sites are finite, and are significant submerged cultural resources. Nautical, maritime, underwater, maritime terrestrial – Maritime Heritage Minnesota's (MHM) deals with all of these types of sites throughout the State of Minnesota. MHM's Mission is to document, conserve, preserve, and when necessary, excavate these finite cultural resources where the welfare of the artifact is paramount. MHM is concerned with protecting our underwater and maritime sites – our shared Maritime History – for their own benefit in order for all Minnesotans to gain the knowledge that can be obtained through their study. MHM's study of wrecks does not include the removal of artifacts or damaging the sites in any way. MHM does not raise wrecks or 'hunt' for 'treasure'. Submerged archaeological sites in Minnesota are subject to the same State statutes as terrestrial sites: the Minnesota Field Archaeology Act (1963), Minnesota Historic Sites Act (1965), the Minnesota Historic District Act (1971), and the Minnesota Private Cemeteries Act (1976) if human remains are associated with a submerged site. Further, the case of *State v. Bollenbach* (1954) and the Federal Abandoned Shipwrecks Act of 1987 provide additional jurisdictional considerations when determining State oversight and "ownership" of resources defined by law as archaeological sites (Marken, Ollendorf, Nunnally, and Anfinson 1997, 3-4). Therefore, just like terrestrial archaeologists working for the State, universities, or with contract firms, underwater archaeologists are required to have the necessary education, appropriate credentials, and hold valid licenses from the Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA).

MHM completed a side and down-imaging sonar survey of White Bear Lake in August 2012 and SCUBA reconnaissance took place in 2014 to identify and document certain anomalies. Prior to the beginning of MHM's work, there were no recognized nautical archaeological or maritime sites in White Bear Lake. In 2014, MHM investigated 26 anomalies and there are now four identified wrecks on the bottom of White Bear Lake, three of which were assigned Minnesota Archaeological Site Numbers (Merriman and Olson 2012, 2014). MHM returned to White Bear Lake in July and August 2024 in order to complete a second comprehensive remote sensing side and down imaging sonar survey using improved sonar technology. After reviewal of the recorded sonar data, another 92 anomalies were identified as possible submerged cultural resources; The alphanumeric designations assigned to the anomalies continued from the numbers assigned after the first survey in 2012, beginning with 56 and ending with 147.



Preface

The White Bear Lake Underwater Archaeology Survey Project 2 (WBLUA-2) took place in mid-September 2025. The purpose of the project was to dive on targets using SCUBA in order to identify them, record video, and take photographs and measurements to answer questions about anomalies on the lake bottom. MHM conducted SCUBA reconnaissance on three anomalies and 1 known wreck.

Results of the White Bear Lake Underwater Archaeology Survey Project 2 (WBLUA-2) Minnesota Archaeology License 25-22

Methodology

The methodology used to identify and rudimentarily document underwater archaeological anomalies is straightforward. MHM used the GPS coordinates of a wreck or an anomaly - taken from the data imbedded in the sonar data - to drop a weighted diver down buoy near the target. The dive boat anchored a short distance away from the buoy and divers geared up for the dive. At any given time, there were two or three divers underwater. If the buoy anchor weight landed near and sometimes on the anomaly or wreck, no search for the target was conducted. However, for a variety of reasons, a brief search for the target was conducted until it was located or it was determined that the anomaly was a false sonar return. If a cultural or natural resource was located, the divers photographed and recorded video of the site or object, logged its basic measurements, and examined any obvious attributes. The three anomalies examined using SCUBA during the WBLUA-2 Project were A66, A117, and A132. MHM also conducted a site assessment on the Judges Boat Wreck (21-WA-113).

Results

One new wreck was identified during the WBLUA-2 Project - Anomaly 117 is a Larson All-American Wreck. The other two unknown targets MHM investigated were Anomaly 132 - is a large tree - and Anomaly 66 could not be located. MHM also conducted a site assessment on the Judges Boat Wreck (21-WA-113). The fieldwork took place on September 11 and 16, 2025. One goal was to collect enough clear video to produce photogrammetric models of Anomaly 117 and the Judges Boat Wreck. Unfortunately, while the visibility on the Larson Wreck was sufficient for video documentation and assessment, it was not good enough to produce a photogrammetric model. Additionally, no video was shot on the Judges Boat Wreck due to near zero visibility.

Larson All-American 176 or 178 Wreck (Anomaly 117)

History: Larson Boats

In 1905, at age 11, Paul Larson designed and built his own scow-ended wooden 10-foot fishing boat in Little Falls, Minnesota. In 1913, at age 19, Larson designed - creating a

set of plans - and constructed a double-ended 2-person duck boat for personal use and in effect, started a boat-building business in his spare time. This vessel was 14.00 feet long, 3.00 feet in the beam with a 12.00 inch depth of hold, and was constructed of white pine strip planking with white oak frames. Larson steamed and bent the frames into their proper shape on his own. The production of this small watercraft resulted in his first orders for boats by local hunters who recognized his talent. He erected his first boat works on a piece of family-owned land on the Mississippi River and he incorporated Larson Boat Works in 1916. Assisted by the development of small outboard motors, the number of small wooden boats produced by Larson for Minnesotans around Little Falls steadily increased, and they were designed to accommodate outboards. In 1922, Larson expanded his business by becoming the first Minnesota dealer of Johnson outboard motors. This partnership directly affected Larson's boat designs – as Johnson motors gained power, resulting in increased speed, Larson introduced racing boats to his line of available watercraft for purchase. Larson advertised "clinker rowboats and strip built (smooth skin) boats for outboard motors. Description and prices on request. Paul G. Larson, Little Falls, Minnesota". With increased business in the mid-1920s, Paul's brother Roy Larson joined the company to oversee outboard motor sales and service. Paul became known for his boat racing ability and he won several trophies for piloting the "boat of Minnetonka fame" *Comet* to victories at various Minnesota lakes.¹ By mid-1929, the variety of wooden boat types available for sale by Larson included stepless hydroplanes and one step hydroplanes that were intentionally designed to accommodate all sizes and brands of outboard motors. Additionally, outboard and row boats in 14.00, 16.00, and 18.00-foot lengths made from cedar strip strakes with white oak frames. The Larson motto, "Beauty, strength and safety in every Larson Boat" was featured in their advertisements (*Brainerd Daily Dispatch* 1923, 1929a; *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 1929; Plueddeman 1988, 123; Sommers 2000, 8-11).



(*Brainerd Daily Dispatch* 1923)

An indicator of the popularity and significance of boating - and fishing - is shown by the scheduled "Larson Boat Works Program" at 8 am on WRHM Radio on July 2 and July 4, 1929. The following month, during a race at Red Wing, Paul Larson was involved in a serious collision. Larson was technically in critical condition, but he retained his composure and piloted his damaged boat - *Spirit of 770* - to safety. A large chunk of wood went into his shoulder and imbedded there, protruding out of both sides of his body. Internally, a smaller splinter and a metal screw lodged themselves between his lung and a bone in his shoulder, requiring surgery. Soon after Larson's recovery, Larson Boat Works provided watercraft for 'motor boat marathon races' that pit their own vessels representing different towns against each other. The goal of the marathon was to keep the boats running constantly for two or more days. By the mid-1930s, Larson Boat Works produced watercraft for vacation resorts, special order vessels for specific buyers, and "wooden boats for the masses". The types constructed included fishing boats, utilities, and runabouts that could be outfitted with windscreens, running lights, and what was termed "fancy upholstery". Additionally, utilitarian watercraft such as

¹Paul Larson won the Labor Day Regatta at Lake Minnetonka in 1928, in addition to the Class C and the 'Free For All' races at Lum Park at Brainerd in 1929, and other similar races (*Brainerd Daily Dispatch* 1929a-b; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* 1929).

duck boats - both new and used - were offered for sale at the Boat Works for as little as \$7.00; offered were both all-wood and canvas covered models (*Minneapolis Star* 1929a-b; *Brainerd Daily Dispatch* 1929c; *Little Falls Daily Transcript* 1929; *St. Cloud Daily Times and Daily Journal-Press* 1932; *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 1934; Sommers 2000, 16).

In August 1936, Larson Boat Works purchased a parcel of land for \$300.00 from the City of Little Falls for an addition to their building. The new section would be a warehouse that measured 30.00 feet by 90.00 feet. The business expansion was due to the high demand for the company's watercraft; 20 men were kept working full time during the summer and 13 during the winter months. With the additional space available by 1938, Larson introduced the Falls Flyer, "a fast, sleek, sporty outboard runabout with as many contours as cedar strips and canvas covering would allow". The Falls Flyer design was referred to as 'futuristic', and Larson's patent application characterized it as a "new, original and ornamental Design for Boats". Larson named the vessel to honor Little Falls native flyer Charles Lindbergh. The company's momentum was brought to a halt on December 13, 1949 when a fire broke out in the main warehouse fueled by varnish, paint, and wood. The fire spread from the main building to two others and all burned to the ground, killing a night watchman. Paul Larson reported that 400 boats were destroyed by the fire. Larson Boat Works was back in production by Autumn 1950, and the grand opening was celebrated on April 26, 1951. The new boat buildings were larger and better equipped than the destroyed facilities. In the early 1950s, the Falls Flyer design underwent changes that retained speed, especially when the hull was manufactured using fiberglass beginning in 1954. In preparation for manufacturing entirely molded fiberglass watercraft, in 1953 Larson offered their wooden-hulled boats with a protective skin of fiberglass if their customers ordered that modification to their vessel.



The New and Exclusive Outboard Runabout

The Falls Flyer

Only outboard runabout of its type built anywhere. Streamlined... Ivory and black decks with red bottom... Chromium trimmed. The Falls Flyer has specially built speed bottom permitting unusual maneuverability and speed. Recommended motors—9 to 33 h.p.

12' Falls Flyer—\$265
14' Falls Flyer—\$295
F.O.B. Little Falls
Weight 240 lbs. and 300 lbs., respectively

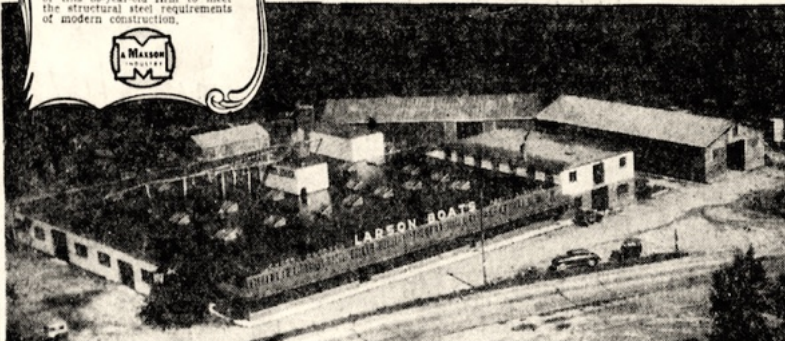
LARSON BOATS LITTLE FALLS MINNESOTA

(*Minneapolis Star Journal* 1940)

Boat Plant, Too.
Erected With Steel From
ST. PAUL FOUNDRY & MANUFACTURING CO.

The Larson Boat Works plant at Little Falls, Minn., is representative of the hundreds of industrial type buildings erected with steel from St. Paul Foundry & Mfg. Co. Builders throughout the Northwest choose with confidence when they call upon the fabricating skill and experience of this 89-year-old firm to meet the structural steel requirements of modern construction.

Larson Boat Works
Manufactures 2,000 Boats Yearly



(*Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 1952)

By 1956-1957, Paul Larson understood that the prosperity of his company - like other firms heading toward primarily-fiberglass boat construction after World War II - depended on training his Little Falls area workforce in molded fiberglass manufacturing techniques. Larson also recognized the need to expand the company through the licensing of his designs for all-fiberglass boats to other, already-established manufacturers in California, Wyoming, Georgia, and Ontario, Canada. To assist him with this goal, Larson took on a new business partner with experience in national sales, Earl Geiger, and sales and marketing expert Chuck Gravelle. Together, these men ascertained that the company needed "the ability to offer a medium-size, family-friendly outboard runabout for a dollar figure an average American (or Canadian) family could afford - and then throw some useful extras in the deal...without jacking up the boat's reasonable suggested retail price." The watercraft design that would be "Larson's ticket to the boating boom's biggest batch of buyers was introduced in 1956 and named the All-American" - a 16-foot long fiberglass runabout with a wooden deck and interior (*St. Cloud DailyTimes* 1936; *Brainerd Daily Dispatch* 1949; *St. Cloud Daily Times* 1951; *Winona Republican Herald* 1949; *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* 1952; Sommers 2000, 24; Hunn 2006, 84-85; Geiger 2009, 1-4).

The Larson Boat Works All American

The affordable fiberglass All-American was produced and sold at a relatively low cost because Larson's boat production team took advantage of the newly-developed Rand Chopper Gun, and determined its viability for use in hull manufacturing. The RCG sprayed a combination of chopped up fiberglass fibers and resin into molds to produce hulls. This time-saving procedure that was much faster and more precise than hand-application of fiberglass into a mold, allowed Larson's workforce to produce lightweight - and generic in a good way- watercraft, with a long list of standard accessories. Then, the Larson sales team and their licensed partners provided points of distinction as add-ons to increase profits and produce more elaborate, but still economical, family watercraft. The All-American's "lapline hull" below the waterline with a smooth hull above it distinguished this model in the late 1950s. MHM refers to fiberglass watercraft with this design, above or below the waterline, as either faux lapstrake or faux clinker. In 1957 a smaller 14.00 foot long All-American was produced alongside the 16.00 foot long model - also constructed with a wooden deck and interior. National attention was gained



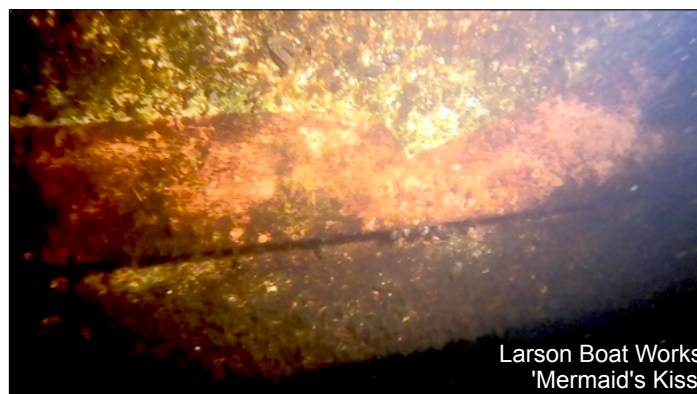
(Larson Boat Works, Inc.
1957, 1959; *Popular Boating*
1959a-b)

for Larson in late 1957 when a 1958 model All-American was a featured item on the new prime-time TV show, 'The Price is Right'. Most All-Americans were adorned with a colored stripe, characterized by some as the 'mermaid's kiss', a spear, or an arrow. This decoration makes vintage All-Americans and other Larson models of the 1950s-1960s easy to spot on Minnesota's lakes and rivers. Year after year, Larson produced the versatile and dependable All-American – "a family boat, a fishing boat, a party boat...the greatest name in boating value". By the end of nearly four decades of production of the All-American in 1994, the model was "undoubtedly the largest selling runabout model ever produced in the world" (Sommers 2000, 31; Hunn 2006, 85).

In regards to Larson Boat Works, the company was sold to Brunswick Corporation in 1960, joining the line-up of Owens Yachts and Cutter Boats that were produced by the company. By 1963, Brunswick's production of Larson watercraft out of Alliance, Ohio, was not successful. A group from the Little Falls business community, with Earl Geiger as the negotiator, bought Larson Boats back from Brunswick - and with it, production in Little Falls. In 1966, Larson Industries purchased Glasspar Boat Company of California, the C.A. Lund Company of Minneapolis, and Northland Skis² of St. Paul. The next year, Larson Industries acquired Rolite, Inc. travel trailers, and that year, sales were reported to be \$31 million. As the decades moved on Larson Industries went bankrupt, was purchased by a few other companies and left Minnesota. In 2019, the Larson Boat Group was purchased by Polaris, Inc., of Roseau, Minnesota, with watercraft production taking place in Indiana (Geiger 2009, 1-8; *Boating Industry* 2019).

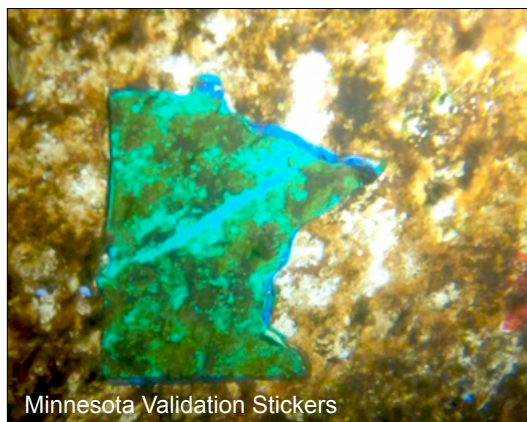
Description: Anomaly 117

Initially MHM interpreted the sonar image of A117, recorded in 2024, as a probable wooden wreck, possibly a Fisherman's Friend or other type of similar rowboat. Investigations using SCUBA determined that the wreck was actually manufactured from fiberglass. The wreck is 16.60 feet long, 6.60 feet in the beam, and 5.70 feet wide at the transom. Most of the outer hull is visible above the lake bottom. The body of the wreck is white, the Larson 'mermaid's kiss' stripe is red, and the 'lapline' design of the hull's bottom is clearly seen. At the bow, the towing ring is intact below the deck. On both port and starboard, located nearly amidships, two Minnesota-shaped registration stickers survive with a blue one under a green one. No

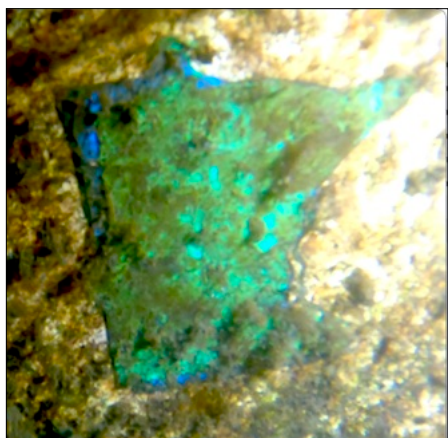


²Northland Hockey Sticks, a subsidiary of Northland Skis, controlled 90% of hockey stick production and sales in the United States. Eighty percent of NHL players used Northland's sticks, and 450 players ordered custom hockey sticks from the company (Geiger 2009, 7).

words on the green stickers have survived and the registration number itself is either removed prior to sinking or is unreadable. The wreck should also have Larson logo stickers on the port and starboard quarters, but they are not discernible.



Minnesota Validation Stickers



Bow Towing Loop

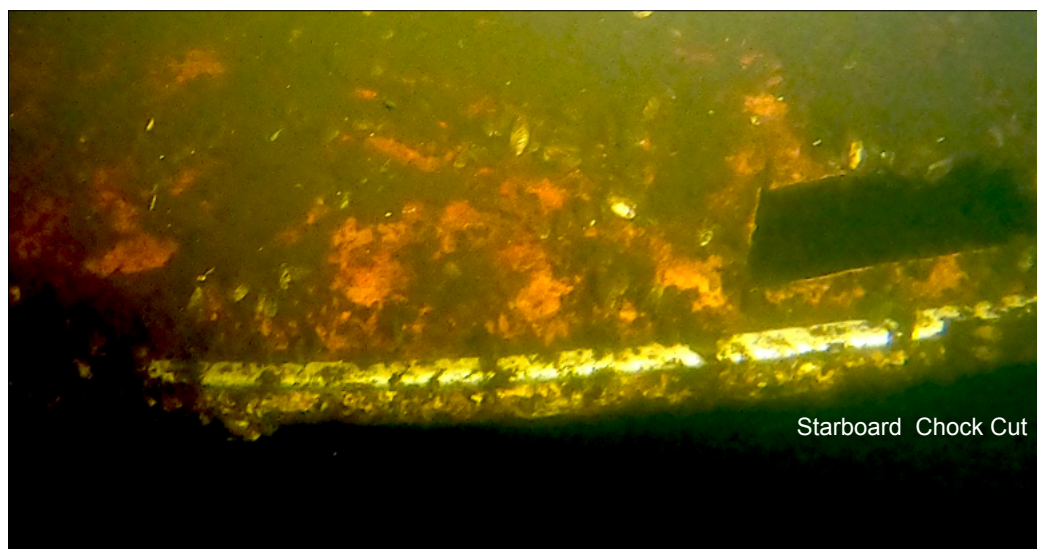
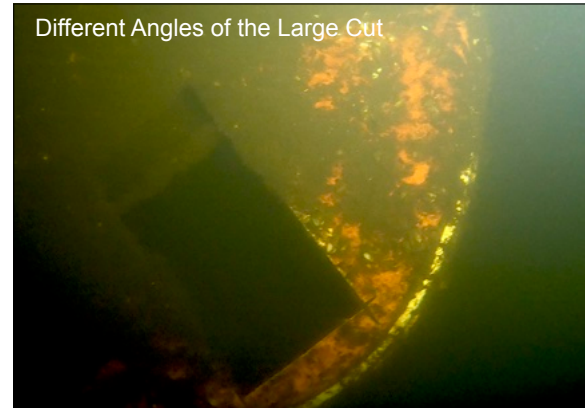


Hull Bottom Lapline Design

The foredeck, gunwales, dashboard, and motor well are red, the same as the mermaid's kiss. Whomever intentionally scuttled A117 used a reciprocating saw or similar tool to cut large chunks of fiberglass out of the wreck to remove chrome fittings. The foredeck has large and small rectangular cut outs of the fiberglass where the bow lifting handle, navigation light, and deck cleat were once attached down the centerline. On port and starboard, two smaller rectangular pieces cut out of the deck mark the locations where chocks were attached.

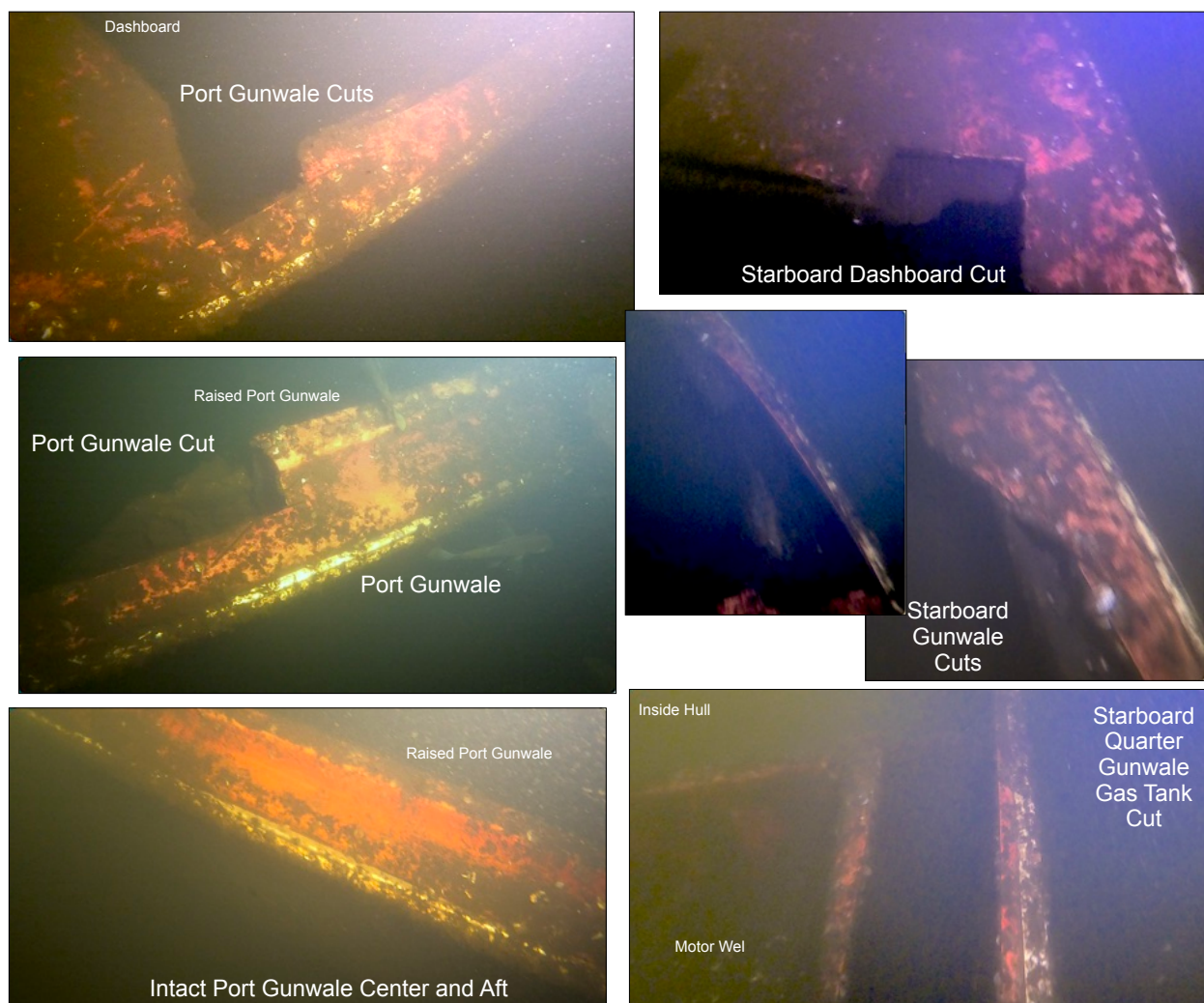


Large Cut at the Location of the Bow Lifting Handle and Navigation Light



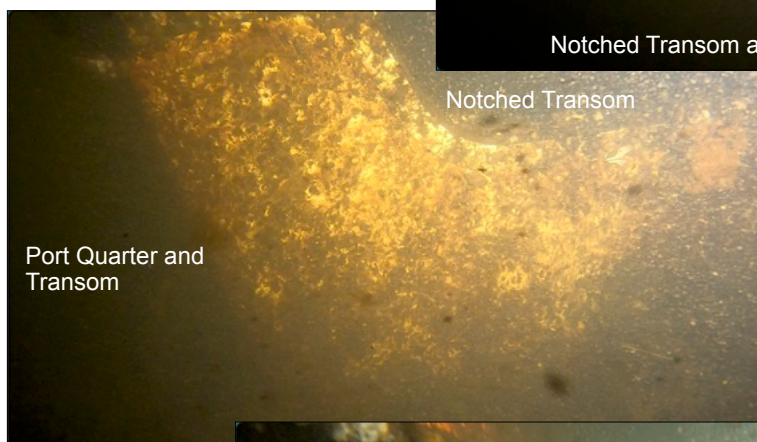
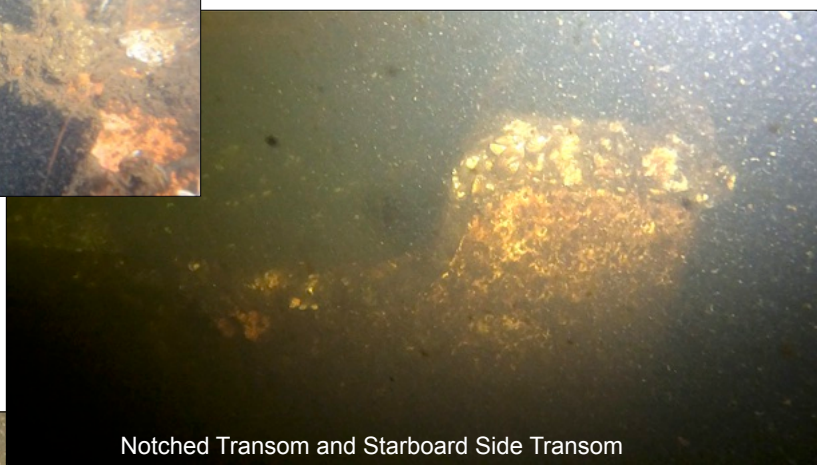
Further aft, where the windshield would have been originally, the dashboard has also been cut with a saw, as well as the gunwales on both sides. Large chunks of the gunwale are missing but the surviving complete areas indicate that the forward gunwale was not flat when it was intact. The inside edge of the gunwale rose upward and there is a ridge where either a soft top with snaps or a hardtop cabin with an additional

windshield was attached. The wreck does not have molded fiberglass front seats; this attribute and the size of the wreck indicate that she is either an All-American 176 Runabout or an All-American 178 Cruiser. MHM cannot discern, at this time, if the wreck is a 176 or a 178. The port quarter gunwale has a small square hole where a chock had been attached. Just aft of this hole is a chrome air scoop - the only deck or gunwale fitting that remains on the wreck. The starboard quarter gunwale has a large rectangular section cut out; MHM suggests this damage was made to remove a gas tank, along with a chrome chock and a step pad that was likely removed as well. The motor well (filled with dead zebra mussels) and transom (that has two outboard motor attachment fittings extant) are intact while the folding stern bench seat is missing, and the outboard motor was removed prior to her scuttling. Inside the wreck, 'newer' blue carpet had been adhered to the inner hull. The two forward seats that would have converted into sunbather bunks are missing (the starboard side seat base is extant, however) and the Ride Guide mechanical steering system and controller are also gone. If the wreck is an All-American 178, the captain's chair and flying bridge are also missing. Loose inside the hull among some fluffy silt, a bit of electrical wire covered with red cloth can be seen. Also, protruding toward the stern from a short bulwark amidships is the wreck's metal bilge discharge pipe. When the boat was on the water, this pipe would be under the inner hull deck and the bulwark would have acted as a deck beam. MHM has deduced that Anomaly 117, if she is an All-American 176 Runabout, was manufactured

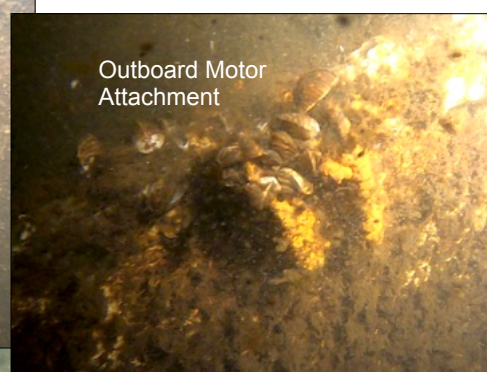




Starboard Transom



Notched Transom



Zebra Mussel Shells in Motor Well



in between 1961-1965; the 1966 model is larger than the wreck. If the wreck is an All-American 178 Cruiser, she was manufactured either in 1961 or 1962 based on activities at Larson Boats and its sale to Brunswick, and its subsequent purchase back from Brunswick. MHM could discern that the All-American 178 was only manufactured in 1961 and 1962, and while it might have been part of the Larson line in 1963-1964, few were made and it is out of the product line by 1965. Taking into account the Minnesota registration validation stickers in consideration of a sinking date for A117, MHM has deduced that the blue sticker dates to 1981-1982-1983 and the green sticker dates to 1985-1986-1987, with a gap in the vessel's registration in 1984. Therefore, the Larson All-American 176 Runabout or 178 Cruiser sank to the lake bottom between 1985 and 2012 when MHM recorded the wreck using sonar during the first survey of White Bear Lake in 2012. However, MHM contends the wreck likely sank to the bottom around 1987. Anomaly 117 cannot be classified as a Minnesota archaeological site at this time because the date of sinking cannot be confirmed. The Larson All-American 176 Runabout or 178 Cruiser Wreck is a protected cultural resource regardless of her archaeological site status.



(Brunswick Boats 1961, 12-13)



All-American 178 Cruiser



Judges Boat Wreck (21-WA-113)

The sonar image recorded of the Judges Boat Wreck did not supply MHM with any new data regarding the wreck that was initially identified in 2014. However, the image does have greater clarity due to the improved sonar unit employed to record it. MHM's assessment dive on the wreck in 2025 did not produce any new data and the poor visibility did not allow for video.



MHM Sonar Judges Boat Wreck (21-WA-113)

Large Tree (Anomaly 132)

The acoustical signature of Anomaly 132 is interesting because it is large and oddly shaped. It is a large tree.

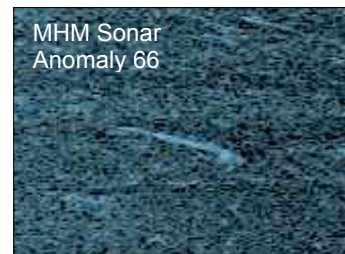


MHM Sonar
Anomaly 132



Anomaly 66

The acoustical signature of Anomaly 66 suggests it is a small watercraft on its side. MHM's attempt to locate the object using SCUBA was not successful due to poor visibility. MHM will search for this anomaly again in the future.



MHM Sonar
Anomaly 66

Conclusion

The WBLUA-2 Project allowed MHM to identify one anomaly as a 1960s Larson All-American 176 Runabout or 178 Cruiser. At this point, the wreck is unique in Minnesota's underwater archaeological record based on her type, and cut-up condition. The only other known All-American wreck in a Minnesota lake is Anomaly 884 in Lake Minnetonka. That wreck is a white and blue All-American 165 standing up in the water column (Merriman and Olson 2022, 41-46). Fittings are sometimes missing from wrecks when MHM identifies them, but their removal by using a saw has not been seen in any Minnesota wreck to date. Anomaly 117 does not meet the criteria of an archaeological site now, but the wreck will receive a Minnesota Archaeological Site Number in the future. The large tree (Anomaly 132) is one of many on the bottom of every Minnesota lake, but in this instance, the sonar signature was interesting and it was not obvious the object was a tree. The elusive Anomaly 66 proved frustrating, but MHM encounters poor visibility regularly and often on a second or even third attempt to find an anomaly, it is located and identified.

Underwater archaeological projects are undertaken to answer specific questions about the anomalies recorded during remote--sensing surveys. The types of questions that can and will be answered about anomalies and sites by using SCUBA reconnaissance include their type/identification, age, construction attributes, context, and provenience. Several research tools are used including line searches, underwater photography and video, measured drawings, triangulation, and photogrammetry – all dependent on the site being investigated. Further, MHM's ethical, responsible, and experienced volunteers greatly assist our projects to educate a wide audience in the proper treatment of all Minnesota's finite underwater and nautical cultural resources – wrecks, maritime infrastructure, artifact clusters, and lone artifacts that can be found on the bottom of our lakes, rivers, and streams throughout the state.

MHM conducts projects to maximize data retrieval through the utilization of effective archaeological methods and theory. The collected data will be analyzed and Minnesota Archaeological Site Forms will be completed and filed with the Office of the State Archaeologist when appropriate. When particular criteria are met, wrecks and other types of maritime sites will be designated as Minnesota Archaeological Sites with a distinct alphanumeric Site Number. The underwater archaeological and maritime historical information produced from all White Bear Lake Projects allows MHM to expand and augment our collective knowledge of Minnesota's finite submerged cultural resources.

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